

A HISTORY OF CATHOLIC
IMMIGRATION COLONIZATION PROJECTS IN THE
UNITED STATES, 1815-1860

BY

SISTER MARY GILBERT KELLY, O.P.

A.B., Rosary College, 1925

A.M., University of Illinois, 1931

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN
HISTORY IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE
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A study of the Catholic immigration colonization movement in the United States from 1815 to the outbreak of the Civil War may well begin with an introductory survey of the general nature and objectives of these colonies, which sought to provide a favorable environment for Catholic immigrants during the period studied, and continue with a brief account of assisting agencies such as religious societies and lay organizations both in Europe and America. Statistics relating to Catholic immigrants indicate that their numbers were sufficient to warrant in promoters the hope of securing large scale participation in directed Catholic settlements. A brief review of Catholic colonies in our country prior to 1815 furnishes data for comparison and contrast with those which form the subject of our study.

Accounts of several "paper" projects, mainly connected with attempts to assist Irish victims of the Great Famine, deserve attention because they demonstrate widespread interest in colonies as a solution of immigrant problems. Contrasting with these are the plans which were put into actual operation. The very term "colony" implies joint effort and some degree of organization. However, none of the colonies considered involved the forming of a joint stock company. Two of the Catholic settlements included (Teutopolis in Illinois and St. Marys in Pennsylvania), above all others, may be designated as "organized" colonies since they came into being after a greater amount of pre-arrangement and advertising than the majority covered by this study.

In actual operation the colonies may be conveniently studied in geographical divisions. They range from Maine to Pennsylvania and westward to Nebraska. The list comprises a single colony in Maine,, the group of Black River Settlements in northern New York, a number scattered about Pennsylvania, and others in northwestern Ohio, southern Illinois, central and southern Minnesota, eastern Wisconsin, and central Michigan.

The Buffalo Emigrant Aid Convention of February 12-15, 1856 requires special mention, since the most comprehensive plans for the establishment of western agricultural settlements were formulated as a result of the discussion leading up to and voiced in that gathering, which was really the climax of the Catholic immigration colonization movement prior to 1860. Outstanding among the lay promoters of this convention, which was expected to establish western colonies for the Irish congregated in great numbers along the Atlantic seaboard, was Thomas D'Arcy McGee. This brilliant but somewhat erratic editor of the *American Celt* incurred for himself and all projects fostered by him the animosity of Archbishop John Hughes of New York. The opposition of Archbishop Hughes, the American bishop who, in the 1850's wielded the greatest influence over the Irish in the United States, was in great measure responsible for the failure of the colonizing projects of the last part of that decade. Closely associated with the Buffalo Convention and the Township of St. Patrick which the Board of Directors of that assemblage planned to purchase, though absolutely independent of the Convention in origin, was the Nebraska Colony of St. Patrick's established by Reverend Jeremiah F. Trecy in 1855. For a few years this Irish Catholic colony in Nebraska furnished a significant illustration of the contrast between practice and theory in the immigration colonization movement.

Active leaders in the establishment of Catholic immigrant settlements included Bishops Benedict Fenwick of Boston and Mathias Loras of Dubuque. Other prominent ecclesiastics of the period, such as Archbishop Peter R. Kenrick of St. Louis and Bishops John Timon of Buffalo, Francis P. Kenrick of Philadelphia, John B. Purcell of Cincinnati, John M. Henni of Milwaukee, Frederick Résé of Detroit, Simon G. Bruté of Vincennes, William Quarter of Chicago, Joseph Cretin of St. Paul, and Michael O'Connor of Pittsburgh, assisted the founders of various colonies both spiritually and financially and encouraged in practical ways, the plan of western agricultural settlements. Prominent among the priests in founding single colonies were the Reverend Theodore J. Van den Broeck, O.P., William J. Horst-

mann, and John J. Hogan; while the zeal of Fathers Joseph Kundek, Helias d' Huddeghem, S.J., and Franz Pierz extended to the formation of groups of Catholic settlements. The list of Catholic laymen most successful in the colonization movement of the period included James and Vincent LeRay, Franz Joseph Stallo, Joseph Picquet, and James Shields. Assistance to the colonizing program was extended by other Catholic priests and laymen.

The hope of being freed from the restrictions hampering the practice of their religion and their economic advancement in certain European countries was a dominant motive in inducing thousands of Catholics to seek new homes with others of their religion and nationality in frontier regions of the United States. Catholic immigrant colonization also received an impetus from the hostility displayed toward Catholic foreigners from about 1830 almost to the outbreak of the Civil War. The prejudice prevalent against Catholic immigrants during this period and the occasional outbursts of persecution resulting from the hostile attitude of the American Nativists and members of the Know Nothing party caused Catholic immigrants to seek homes for themselves in localities where they would be free to carry on the practices of their religion in peace. The colonies of Benedicta in Maine, St. Marys in Pennsylvania, and the group of settlements in Stearns County, Minnesota, were the ones most closely connected with the antagonism evinced against the Irish and German Catholics in Boston, Philadelphia, and Cincinnati, and the environs of these cities.

The inception of the Buffalo Convention was closely connected with the prevalence of Know Nothingism in the eastern part of the Union and was fostered by Irish Americans convinced that the anti-foreign, anti-Catholic agitation sponsored by this party was not a passing phase of the political and social ideas of the American people. In consequence of losses in the national election of 1856 and the dominance during the next four years of issues culminating in the Civil War, active nativism in the United States disappeared; this together with personal opposition of certain ecclesiastical leaders in the eastern states to the

policies advocated by the prime mover of the Buffalo Convention in great measure contributed to the failure of the colonization projects urged at that meeting.

The Catholic foreigners who came directly from their European homeland to our country in response to invitations sent out by the founders of these colonies might have been dispersed widely and so have lost their religious and national identity had they come under different circumstances. Others already in the United States had settled for a time in some region farther east before proceeding to the colony where they settled. Although in each of these Catholic colonies one national element predominated—German, Irish, French, Swiss, Dutch, or Belgian—frequently a few families of a different nationality came to the colony almost at its beginning. Typical examples of this situation are found in *Benedicta*, begun by Irish settlers but which included three or four German families in its population before the end of the first year; in the predominantly German settlements fostered by Reverend Franz Pierz in Stearns County, Minnesota, where Irish, English, Dutch, and Swiss families likewise responded to the promoter's invitation to settle in his mission territory; and in central Missouri where Belgians and Irish settled among the earlier established German colonists. The immigrants attracted to the Black River settlements around Carthage, New York were at first largely Frenchmen, but early in the 1830's Germans and Irishmen arrived in such numbers that separate colonies were established by them in the neighborhood. Moreover, it often happened that a few families of so-called American stock had earlier taken up land in the region of these colony sites. These early American settlers, whether Protestant or Catholic, generally welcomed the Catholic newcomers and assisted them in making the adjustment to frontier life. The Catholic families who moved as colonists into rural sections of the Atlantic and trans-Appalachian regions added thousands of upright, industrious persons to the population of the states in which they settled. It seems permissible to accept the belief stated by Thomas D'Arcy McGee in the autumn of 1856, when the failure of the Buffalo Convention program was

apparent, that more homes had been established and better family foundations laid through the colonization movement than could have been effected by all other agencies combined.

The Catholic immigration colonization movement has provided a fresh illustration of the generally unfriendly attitude of the people in the eastern part of the United States toward the draining of population to the West, even at times when many individuals in large centers of population in the East were complaining about the financial burden resulting from the necessity of caring for large numbers of foreigners unable to obtain a livelihood in an over-crowded labor market.

Relations between Europe and the United States in the matter of financial assistance and personal service in religious affairs illustrate an interesting phase of cooperation during the first half of the nineteenth century between the Old World and the young nation peopled to a great extent by Europeans of various nationalities. In response to the plea of members of the hierarchy in the United States, several European religious orders sent to the new American dioceses members who were stationed as resident pastors in the recently founded colonies or who visited such centers from time to time.

Some conception of the value attached by the Catholic Church to a system of education combining religious instruction with that of the ordinary branches of education may be obtained through observation of the numerous successful efforts made to establish parochial schools in the colonies herein discussed. In several cases, notably in Oldenburg, Indiana, Teutopolis, Illinois, and St. Cloud, Minnesota, institutions of higher education under the auspices of Catholic religious orders were founded shortly after the close of the period being considered.

Most important in connection with the circumstances pictured in this thesis, is the fact that despite the failure of the Buffalo Convention the Catholic immigration colonization movement in the United States from 1815 to 1860 was successful. Apart from the Irish colony of St. Patrick's in Nebraska Territory, the French settlement of Porrentruy, Indiana, and Father John Hogan's Irish settlement in southern Missouri, all of the colonies

established between these dates flourished. None of them advanced to the status of a large city; but, with the exceptions noted, all have continued to exist and have become substantial parishes.

The materials available consist largely of manuscripts in ecclesiastical archives, printed ecclesiastical records, and contemporary newspapers. In addition, parish, diocese, and county histories and a number of scholarly monographs have been helpful. In order to make use of these materials the writer made personal visits to Washington, D. C., Baltimore, Philadelphia, Buffalo, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Milwaukee, St. Paul, and Notre Dame. Other information was secured through correspondence. Among the valuable sources available for this study in the University of Illinois Library are *Berichte der Leopoldinen-Stiftung im Kaiserthume Oesterreich* and *Deutsche Pionier*, the latter being in the Rattermann Collection.

VITA

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